



*Their love  
has lasted  
62 years  
From Sunday School  
to country school,  
faith kept them going*



**SWEETHEARTS FOR OVER 62 YEARS**, Eulaine Erikson and Wesley Benda married June 12, 1944, at the Herndon Covenant Church and lived on farms south of Achilles and on her parents' home place southwest of the church before retiring and moving to Oberlin.

By MARY LOU OLSON

The day they married, it rained so hard people couldn't hear the vows, and the couple's car broke down, delaying the honeymoon, but their union has endured for 62 years.

"I suppose we could say that we met during young people's Sunday School classes at the Herndon Covenant Church," said Wesley Benda, whose wife, the former Eulaine Erikson, has been his special Valentine for more than six decades.

"Our first date was an FFA date picnic during our freshman year at Decatur Community High School," Mr. Benda said. "We were friends and dated occasionally during high school, and actually double dated, but not with each other."

"Little did we know that around 10 years later we would date steadily, get married and have six wonderful children."

After both graduated in 1937, he headed to Kansas State College in Manhattan and Eulaine began teaching country school after completing the "normal" training course in high school. She taught seven years at schools at Bassettville, Achilles and Linda.

"I stayed during the week with families near my first school, Bassettville," Mrs. Benda said, "and my dad, George Erikson, would pick me up on Friday afternoon, then take me back on Sunday evening. I remember crying every Sunday night, because I always got so homesick. It seemed so far from home."

Plans changed for Mr. Benda near the beginning of his second year of college when his father, Robert Benda, died after a heart attack. Being the oldest in a family of four, he returned home to help his mother run the family farm north of Achilles.

"I had a younger brother John, in high school, and sisters, now Esther Noren, who was in grade school, and Ida Marie Erikson, who was only 4," he said, "and I helped Mother get them ready for school and for church."

He said through the help of relatives, neighbors and the congregation, the



family had wood that first winter, as well as feed for the livestock. Their livelihood was from milking cows and selling cream and eggs.

"Eulaine and I had our first date on April 1, 1942, after I returned home from Manhattan," he recalled. "On Oct. 1, 1943, my parents' wedding anniversary, I asked her to marry me after we had gone to see the movie, 'I've Got My Eyes On You.' I popped the question after taking her home as we were parked in the yard."

"We were married on June 12, 1944, on the 25th anniversary of Eulaine's parents, George and Olive Erikson, at the Herndon Covenant Church by Eulaine's uncle, the Rev. Fred Eastburg. Our attendants were her sisters, Fern (Wenger) and Eula (Waldo), my brother, John, and our cousin, Leroy Schmidt."

Mr. Benda said that there was such a downpour during the wedding that the congregation could hardly hear them repeat their vows. He said their car broke down, so they spent their first night at his mother's place.

"The rear end went out of the car," he said, "but my brother and Leroy found a used one and put it in, so we were able to leave the following day."

The couple first lived four miles south of Achilles on ground which he rented from his grandfather, J.W. Hurst. Their oldest child, Connie, was born on their first anniversary. Their children attended school at Achilles, where both of the couple's mothers also had taught.

Mr. Benda was born in Oberlin and his parents were Robert and Hazel (Hurst) Benda. He said he worked at

the Safeway store on Penn Ave. during high school to help earn money for college.

Mrs. Benda, the daughter of George and Olive Erikson, was born and reared on a farm southwest of the church in Rawlins County. Besides her sisters, she had two brothers, Kermit and Cordette, who drowned in separate accidents.

"When I started to country school," Mrs. Benda said, "my first teacher was Aunt Elsa Holmdahl. I could speak very little English, as Swedish was spoken in our home. However, my aunt helped me a great deal, as she spoke both very well."

"My best childhood memory was Christmas Eve at Grandma Holmdahl's. Our families went early in the evening to celebrate Christmas and then the older ones went to Julotta services at 6 a.m. the next morning at the church. After taking piano lessons from Elna Larson, I was appointed church organist and played an old pump organ."

"After we were married," Mr. Benda said, "Eulaine insisted that we have daily devotions, something we have continued over the years; Eulaine at the Good Samaritan Center now, and myself at home."

"We pray for each member of our family, for others in need of help and for guidance for each day. We continue to attend the Herndon Covenant Church, weather permitting. This has been Eulaine's home church since her birth and mine for 70 years, after transferring my membership from the Achilles Methodist Church."

Mr. Benda has served in all offices of the church as well as being a Sunday School teacher, choir member and director, and he also shares his talent as a violinist. His wife has been organist, pianist, Sunday School teacher and held all offices of Covenant Women Ministries.

"Our social life has always been centered around church events and school," Mr. Benda said, "but we managed to attend a number of wrestling tournaments and a few basketball tournaments."



**THE BENDAS** celebrated their 50th anniversary in 1994.

"I suppose the most exciting was when the state wrestling tournament was held in Oberlin and Eulaine's younger brother, Cordette, took first in state in his weight class."

The family moved to the farmstead of her parents after the Eriksons retired and moved to Oberlin. Since the Bendas retired and moved to Oberlin, their son, Gerald and his wife, Patti, live there and do the farming.

The couple's family includes their six children, Connie and Bob Smith, Eden Prairie, Minn.; Leanne and

Losson Pike, Ashland; Gerald and Patti Benda; Ludell; Shirley and Daryl Maresch, Nekoma; Beverly and Mitch Messerly, Sublette; and Barbara and Mark Olson, Oberlin; 14 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

"With family members and spouses, the family totals 39, 32 of which spent Christmas Eve together in our home," Mr. Benda said. "We are truly blessed."

"I believe our mutual faith and trust in each other has been the key to our happy marriage."